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Das Madchen (with apologies to Jamaica Kincaid)

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Das Mädchen

(with apologies to Jamaica Kincaid)

by Rita Puishes

Sterilize the shiny silver milk pails and giant bottles for feeding the calves in the morning; throw a blizzard of corn to the chickens after school; jerk the eggs from beneath the cranky hens and wash them before dinner; and this is how you turn pie crust trimmings into cinnamon treats; even when invited, don't call elders by their first names; did you sneak your Reader home and lie to your teacher when you forgot to take it back?; this is where the ripest wild blackberries loom in the brightest sunshine; don't tell lies if you don't like the taste of soap; books siphon you away until only touch startles you back; how was I to know a lie felt until I found I was no good at it?; keep your mouth closed while you chew, you are not a cow; take a small helping of everything that is served-whether you like it or not-and a clean plate is the only pass that will free you from camping at the table until bedtime; alum cannot help the warts lying puts on your tongue; young ladies wear dresses because they are dainty and they do not shoot purees; cat's eyes, and boulders in the mud with boys; overlooked food found on dishes will ensure that you redry every dish in the cupboard; and this is how to make cherry winks, spritz cookies, and fruit cakes for Christmas; good clothes are for school and church, patched dungarees are only for chores and play; murmurs resound inside a church and you should never say "give a little, take a little" while holding the collection plate!; persistent reading

while setting the table will ensure that you forget to put something out; liars are cowards who lack the courage to face the consequences truth requires; and this is how to frost your father's favorite chocolate cake; young ladies do not curse and they definitely don't sit Indian style while they're wearing dresses; you should never accept money from neighbors for kindnesses you do-even if the iron did scald your hand; people don't trust occasional truths when they spill from a liar's mouth; your recall of one past mistake rival an elephant's, can't your nostrils detect the new honeysuckle of truths surrounding me?; men prefer ladies who know more about cooking grease than axle grease; red and pink may be favored colors, but they clash when worn together; you will surely break something if you vacuum and read at the same time; and this is how to make hospital corners when you change the bed linens; men prefer ladies who tinker in kitchens, not garages; and this is how to prewash white clothes in cold water before you bleach them in hot; lies will turn on you as viciously as any mistreated animal; and this is how you might knead dough if it weren't for the motor oil under your fingernails; a bathroom is not totally clean until the pipes behind the toilet have been polished too; it is unseemly for ladies to play football-especially tackle; learning to sew a straight seam becomes easier when you concentrate on more than the need to escape it; husbands prefer wives who drive cars, not dismantle them; ladies who shun cooking lessons don't serve succulent meals-did you finally read a cookbook? You know the truth!

